



## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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Daddy

*My darling father, Peter Otto (Asher) Hirschberg ran out of time on Sunday, July 28, 2002 at 12:10 a.m. His Hebrew name was Asher, but at the time and place where he was born, Jews were not allowed to have Hebrew names, so Otto it was.*

*While his grieving widow and, his loving daughter sobbed at his slowly cooling body, his soul, finally free of pain and straining to reach his father, mother and sister, hovered, trying to comfort us.*

*He had escaped death four times – the first as a child of 15 when he left his home in Lithuania ahead of the German scourge. The second as a U.S. soldier on the barren island of Iwo Jima. He was one of the few GI's who joined the Marines in smoking out the Japanese during World War II. The third as a 63-year old heart bypass recipient. Almost two decades later, his heart seized up and a caring surgeon's hands sewed life back into him in a second bypass operation.*

*Finally, on that hot sticky blue night in Washington, D.C., his brave heart gave out. Son, brother, husband, father, soldier, geographer, poet, scholar, Jew, atheist, Zionist, American – he lost his fight against the night, as we all must.*

June, 1986

I was born on August 28, 1923 in the private hospital of Dr. Miller in Koenigsberg, capital of East Prussia. From Koenigsberg, we traveled by car to Memel, Lithuania, which was our home. My Bris was in Memel under the capable hands of Mr. Rosinkwitz, the local Mohel.

I have some vague recollections from my very early years. Probably, the first is that I was lying naked on my back on a table and being powdered, or something of that nature. This was in our summer villa on the second floor. The table was surrounded by my nurse, my mother and her three older sisters, Eda, Lenchen (Helen) and Taube (Paloma). They were laughing at me, I suppose, but I have forgiven them.

Another incident I remember may have taken place that same summer at the beach. All of a sudden, I was hit by a wave, fell, swallowed water and felt myself near death. Ruth, my youngest aunt and only three years older than I, pulled me out of it.

The third incident happened in our kitchen in Memel. I probably was less than three years old. I tried to get up from the tile floor by holding on to a huge bottle of raspberry juice. The bottle broke. That is as far as my memory goes. However, I still have a scar on my wrist, where many stitches were taken.



And last, and probably least, I remember a successful BM on my potty, and the applause from my parents or nurse. I also received applause when I happily raised my arms above my head. This was always in response to the question: "Wie gross will der Peter werden?" ("How tall does Peter want to be?")

Well, I did my best, but my forebears' genes kept me down to five foot six inches.

At this moment I have had a surfeit of the past. So here is a toast to the future. I propose a great meal, en famille, in a great French, Italian or Spanish restaurant anywhere in the First World, and under optimum conditions; a most important one being an empty stomach and good health. A copious amount of the finest caviar should be available. Everyone should be in an expansive (as well as expensive) mood, with all burning desires, if any, recently fulfilled; and, therefore, primed for a long Lucullan romp through the victuals. A Russian Gypsy orchestra would provide the music at not too discreet a decibel. Dress would be formal, with gorgeous jewelry worn by the ladies. Only two wines are to be served with dinner: an outstanding champagne and a top vintage claret or red Burgundy. A select cognac will follow the meal as will Monte Cristo cigars for the gentlemen<sup>1</sup>. The chef has carte blanche for selecting and preparing the meal, but the food must be light – no beef allowed.

Vegetables and fruit should have been picked that morning. Tiny forest strawberries could have been flown in from somewhere in northeast Europe.

We must not forget the setting, either. The restaurant should be located above an ocean shore and the view should be over the water, preferably from an open terrace.

#### Earliest Recollections (1925-27?)

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<sup>1</sup> This was before his first heart attack, after which he stopped smoking cigars.



*My father wrote different essays on the same subject. One of the recurring themes was his earliest memories. During the last week of his life, he had terrible pain from his angina. I am glad that he had these happy memories to recall during those sleepless nights and that he wrote them down.*

My first memory was pleasant. It was summer in Sandkrug, our summer house. I was nude, lying on a dressing table on my back, surrounded by my mother, Schwester Bertha, my nurse, and aunts Eda and Lenchen. They were highly amused by me and were laughing and giggling. It may have been the last time I performed as a flasher.

Krug also means tavern. A tavern still stood on a hill northwest of the ferry landing. Although almost outdoors all day under the pale Baltic sun, I never managed to get more than a slightly peeling nose plus a very light tan. I remember the chilly waters temperature recorded by the Bademeister hourly on a blackboard. In late summer they were about 18 degrees centigrade (65 Degrees Fahrenheit); in early June, 6 degrees Centigrade (43 degrees F).

Again, summer in Sandkrug, on the beach. I was knocked down by a small Baltic wave and was choking. My aunt Ruth, 3 years older, pulled me out of the water. She was 6 or 7 years old. I was scared.

I was trying to raise myself from the floor of our tiled kitchen. I used a huge bottle of raspberry juice as support. The bottle broke and cut my right wrist. Blood started to gush. I still have the scar. I screamed, probably louder than I did at the beach, because this time my lungs were clear.

*He remembered an incident as a slightly older child, which will give the reader some idea of his nature; he was always civilized and polite, but seething with rebellion.*

I was a little boy; maybe four years old; walking north between my mother and kinderfraulein (nanny) where the Borsenstrasse (Stock Exchange Street) becomes the Libauerstrasse. In my hand, I carried a little speckled wooden horse fastened to a wooden board. At the bottom of the board were four wheels and a string for pulling the damn contraption. I didn't like the thing. So I waited for an opportune moment to deposit it on the sidewalk without either my mother or the kinderfraulein noticing it. I was successful, too.

Unfortunately, a few moments later, a young man in workman's clothes rushed up to my mother and said: "Lady, your little boy dropped this!" My mother thanked him. I did not.

Memel



*When I was young, Daddy would regale me with stories about Memel. There, the food was always better, the women more beautiful, the experiences more intense and life much easier than now, as things always seem when they are lost.*

Although Memel now seems pretty much Hicksville, it really was more than that. For example, the two main groups were the Germans, who spoke German, and the Lithuanians, who spoke Lithuanian, but many of them also spoke German. The Jews spoke German, Yiddish (pronounced eedish), Russian, Lithuanian. French was understood and spoken by many of the more educated Jews.

My parents spoke German with each other and with my sister and myself. My grandfather, Sundel Hirschberg, spoke German with us, although his first languages were Hebrew and Yiddish. He also knew some Arabic and Turkish. My father also spoke Yiddish, Hebrew and French. My mother spoke all of those except Hebrew. She also was fluent in English, Lithuanian and Russian. Her parents spoke Yiddish at home.

The parents of my friends spoke either Yiddish, German or Russian at home. My friend, George Anschelewitz, told me that he had no common language with his parents. They spoke Yiddish and he German; being raised by a German governess until he was ten years old.

Since my contemporaries and I didn't know French or Russian, certain delicate words were spoken in those languages. Thus, no one said "schwanger," the German for pregnant; but rather "enceinte" (French) or "palazhenye" (Russian).

As far as the four letter "F" word is concerned (for which in German the "i" is substituted for the English "u") that was completely and absolutely taboo. I really don't remember cursing at all, even as a fifteen-year old. But maybe I am wrong. What the f...'



My parents' house was Alexanderstrasse 19. It had three floors and a basement. In the basement lived the Plenys family. He was a mailman and also the janitor. The first floor had two apartments; one was my grandfather Sundel's. A wide, wooden spiral staircase led to the second floor, where we lived. A Fraulein Schreiber, an elderly lady daughter of the previous owner of the house, who had been mayor of Memel, lived on the third floor, which was an attic floor.

Behind the house extended a cobbled courtyard with stone paths, a chicken coop, storage rooms for coal, lumber, apples, potatoes, etc. A gate led to a big garden behind the courtyard. We had plum, pear, apple and cherry trees, as well as an elaborate gazebo. High stone walls surrounded the sides and rear of the property.

Silk wallpaper, too dark for my taste, covered the walls of the rooms. Room-high glazed tiled stoves furnished the heat. The stoves for the bedrooms were fired from the hall. This was done usually at 5 a.m. or so. In the afternoon, they were given an additional little charge of coal briquettes. Thus, the stoves would be pleasantly warm to the touch all winter long and the rooms were never unpleasantly dry. Some of the stoves had tile friezes.

Both my father and grandfather loved Oriental rugs; so the parquet floors were covered with them. Twice a year they would be taken out and beaten to remove dust. The furniture was heavy, dark, made to order and never rearranged. My father's library was all dark, leather easy chairs, etc. A huge grandfather clock in the dining room served as an occasional hiding place for my sister and me.

The paintings on the wall were done by reputable artists, I suppose; the European equivalent of the Barbizon School style, because no one in the family, except my favorite Aunt Eda, seemed to know or care about art. And what could be safer than landscapes and cattle?

A big, but elegant vitrine in the living room, the only lively piece of furniture, held a collection of crystal and elaborate ivory carvings which my father fancied. An entrance hall with a clothes rack also served as the sewing room, for the sewing lady. The machine was of the foot-treadle type. Electricity was used only for lighting the rooms and powering the radio, an elaborate two-piece affair, the loudspeaker being the second piece. I did not know of the existence of refrigerators, vacuum cleaners or toasters.

Our refrigerator consisted of a massively walled and windowless dark room with a single bulb, cool the year round. The main item in the kitchen, a huge wood-fueled stove, maybe 8 by 3 feet, and table-high, served to heat all food, except for a separate one-ring gas burner. The kitchen had a tile floor as did the bathroom. A gas stove heated the bathwater. The toilet tank was at the ceiling and when you pulled a heavy chain, the water came crashing down a pipe with a great roar and rumble.



There was no liberty taken with furniture. By that I mean that it just stood there the way it was planted upon receipt from the furniture maker. The furniture was made to order. It was substantial, dark and was complimented by the darkish silk wallpaper with baroque designs. A very pleasant feature of the house were the tile stoves extending from floor to ceiling and each piercing the wall between the two rooms. Every morning very early they would be cleaned and stoked with wood. In front of each stove was a nailed-down brass plate about two by three feet. The tiles were a different color for each stove, and all colors were warm in hue. Some of the stoves were decorated with tiles in bas-relief depicting knights or shepherds and our dark green dining room stove had, as an integral part, a bench which made for pleasantly warm sitting when coming in from playing in the snow.

My father's room seemed especially dark because of the dark and heavy glassed-in book cases and a sofa and easy chairs upholstered and covered with dark leather. My parents' bedroom and my grandmother's room, on the other hand, had light-colored, elegant and airy furniture. Our room, the children's room, had simple blue-painted furniture.

In the living room was the Bluethner Fluegel (Concert Grand piano) which furnished a fine playing base to play under, but became associated with pain when used as the instrument for later piano lessons. My father, who was extremely musical, labored under the mistaken impression that his children would follow suit. However, this was not the case and my sister was even less interested in the piano than I was. My father played other instruments as well. He had a violin, mandolin, flute; but his favorite was a Hohner accordion. He didn't have to play alone, for quite often, professional musicians from various bands then performing in Memel cafes, would spend the evenings playing in our home. I have no idea how my mother felt about it all because music was alien to her. She did tell me once, though, that she loved it when my father courted her with singing and playing lieder, such as "Am Brunnen vor dem Tore."

## Getting around



Transportation in Memel was on foot. You walked! That's all there was to it. In about four minutes you could walk the length of the city of 35,000. The only bus line, previously a single-track trolley, must have been used by the very old and lame only.

I don't remember ever being in a taxi, although there was a taxistand at the Alexanderplatz in the middle of town. A phone booth went with the stand; but I don't believe that it was coin-operated.

Like all my friends, I had a bicycle, Goricke, a German make. I used it mainly in summer, when we lived at our summer home in Sandkrug (Smiltyne) at the northern tip of the Kurische Nehrung (Kursiv Neringa), a 50 by 1 mile sandspit between the Haff (Bay) and the Baltic Sea.

We also had, for special occasions, a brougham; a droschke (droshky) which is a horse-drawn convertible; and a convertible sleigh. These were quartered, together with horses, at my grandfather's sawmill in Janischkein, the (dare I use the phrase?) industrial suburb of Memel.

## Clothing



All these reminiscences are written at random with the thought that my children and any of their offspring (alewai) shall find them of interest. For to be a Jew not only means to honor and understand those who have come before, but also to help provide a link with those who come after. Thus, there can be no fact which is trivial.

Today, (May 12, 1986) I'll jot down what comes to mind when I think of the clothes worn in the 1930's in Memel (Klaipeda). My father and both grandfathers always wore vest, coat and tie, from morning until they retired. In summer, though, my father would wear a polo shirt and jacket. My grandfather Jakob was a very careful dresser. On holidays, when I accompanied him to the synagogue, he would always wear a frock coat and silk top hat. Normally, he'd wear a black derby and gray spats. My grandfather Sundel wore dark suits and fedoras.

All three carried gold pocket watches. My father, who cut a dashing figure, occasionally carried a black-rimmed monocle. Boys wore short pants until Bar-Mitzvah. Only then did we begin wearing long pants for special occasions. All male outer clothing was tailor-made. Underwear was store bought. I hated knickerbockers because of the tight elastic above the calf. Every few months a seamstress came for several days to darn and repair clothing for the family. She worked on our treadle sewing machine and darned socks as well. Her name was Fraulein Wilks. She ate breakfast with me and my sister. Her fiancé was lost at sea. Somehow, this always intrigued me for I was intensely interested in far-away places, especially the tropics.

My father had a fine library which included many serious travel and exploration volumes which I read avidly. Most were on Africa. Lithuanian writers were too dark and long to go in for travel literature dealing with even darker and colder regions, such as the Arctic and Antarctic. But I did read one of his books on Nobile's ill-fated rescue mission to the Amundsen North Polar expedition. One of the books he carefully selected for me had descriptions of children's lives in various parts of the world, with photographs of the children. The one I liked best was about Samoa. A little boy was sitting on a white, coconut palm-bordered beach. I always loved beaches and the sea and wished I could be there, too. Ten years or so later, I was, and not disappointed, either. It was idyllic.

Our winter underwear was ridiculous. We wore shorts which was fine but on top we wore a bodice with an elastic band hanging on each side. The bottom of that band would snap onto a long cotton or wool stocking. Every week a washerwoman would come for two days, I think, to wash all the dirty clothes by hand; then dry and iron them.

An important but negative part of my life in those early years was occupied by clothing; namely how to cope with the restrictions imposed by having to wear and handle clothing . Even as a 7 or 8-year-old I had great trouble with so simple a task as putting on socks. The tying of shoelaces was excruciatingly difficult. In school, after gym, when putting our clothes on, only Aaron Gurewitz, the baker's son, was slower than I. I remember getting my kicks then by watching him roll his tongue and double it over while coping with *his* shoelaces. I also remember the most ridiculously complex underwear. One item was the aforementioned cotton bodice, which buttoned in the back just to make



dressing a bit more difficult. Hanging from each side of this contraption were inch-wide elastic bands whose lower ends snapped on to thigh-high cotton stockings. At least I was spared wool stockings because wool next to my skin made me break out in a rash. God knows what my younger sister Dagmar had to cope with. No doubt, she was more dexterous than I.

All of these paraphernalia were forgotten during those blessed summers. Then, I could have used kneepads, however, because all summer my knees were either bleeding or scabby; mostly because of all sorts of falls.

Not much liberty was taken in Memel with clothes. I never saw father or either of my grandfathers without a tie, vest and suit, except at the beach. Both grandfathers sported spats; one used a walking stick. All men and boys always wore hats or caps outdoors. The cap was for doffing if you met an adult acquaintance on the street. You would even go across the street to shake hands; which could mean being detained for minutes by some inane adult questioning. Since the town was small (about 30,000 people) and I must have known quite a few people, these encounters were all too frequent. Once, while walking with the newly arrived Parisian bridegroom of one of my mother's cousins, he said to me: "Do you people always observe these strange rituals?"

Much worse to cope with than clothing was school.<sup>2</sup>

Early in 1939, my gym teacher in Atlantic City<sup>3</sup> asked me if war would break out in Europe. He had fought in the last war. I told him "yes" and that it would be much more horrible than the World War. I was 15; but even years earlier I had felt an almost palpable hatred in Memel and knew that this hatred spread over much of Europe. Being amid German high school students, I had no illusions and realized then, 1938 or even earlier, that mass atrocities would be committed gleefully by these fellow students; and applauded by old and young alike as soon as they had a chance.

One day in the Memel schoolyard during recess, a fellow student named Reuter was playfully squirting a syringe filled with talcum powder or its equivalent. It hit me in the eye and I was surprised when he very contritely told me that he didn't mean to hit me in the eye. I thought "you may not mean to hit me in the eye now, but fairly soon you'll try to hit me with a bullet."

This aggressive hatred was felt by many of us Jews. My mother's cousin, Gabriel Jawsicz told me when I asked him about his experiences that he first knew what freedom was when he went to England after completing high school in Memel, about 1928.

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<sup>2</sup> Daddy talked about school a lot, but I couldn't find any writings about it. As a boy, he hated going, hated his teachers and hated being cooped up in a room all day when there were so many marvels out in the world for him to discover!

<sup>3</sup> Daddy moved to Atlantic City first after leaving Lithuania. He stayed there for a year, attending Atlantic City High School, living with his Aunt Jette (his father's sister), her husband and their daughter who committed suicide. They lived in an apartment on Caspian Avenue in the Inlet section. He then moved to New York City to west 98<sup>th</sup> St. with his Aunt Eda and her family. He attended Harran High where many "refs" as he called his fellow exiles, had landed because of its proximity to their homes on the West Side.



After one year in Atlantic city, I moved to New York in December 1939, where I lived with my favorite Aunt Eda, Uncle Fima (Jefim) and their daughter Gabrielle at 243 W. 98<sup>th</sup> Street. It always seemed to be raining then; a reflection, I guess, of the hard times we went through. My uncle, who had a pre-World War I degree from Moscow University in "Nationalekonomie" was selling office supplies. Two bedrooms were rented out to other refugees; Mr. Solc, a Polish lawyer and Mr. Karantberiwel, a Russian businessman. But my Aunt Eda was always in a good mood. In the evenings, there were card games with friends; mostly poker. And always tea and cake – never alcohol. Drinking was not part of the East European Jewish ambiance (I've come a long way since then, baby).

Mr. Karantberiwel was a business friend of my uncle from Berlin, where they fled to after the Bolsheviks (Communists) took over Russia. Mr. Krantberiwel, a bushy bearded black-haired athlete had been an avid amateur boxer and still followed the sport. Mr. Solc came from one of the leading Jewish families in Vilna. Neither spoke Yiddish, nor did my Uncle Fima. The latter grew up in Moscow, second of three sons of extremely wealthy, assimilated parents who belonged to the "Erste Gilde" (First Guild); the few Jews who were legally residents of Moscow. I believe he was the only Jewish ensign in the Russian Navy.

The following is a story he told me which indicates the cavalier attitude of the average European toward the First World War, when it had just begun. Fima was in Berlin then and was being repatriated via Sweden to Russia. His fear was that he would not make it back to Russia in time to join his ship and participate in the Victory Parade in Berlin after the war. My father, a teenager then, expected, with the rest of the Germans, that France would be routed as in 1871 and victory would be celebrated before he could join the army.

The halcyon days, before the outbreak of the First World War, were always referred to by my grandparents as "friedenszeiten" (peace times). They never used that expression for the 1930's, although there was peace then, too, in our part of the world, and my grandfather Jakob was a successful businessman. Barbara Tuchman, in her book The Guns of August, describes the abysmal lack of foresight of the Europeans as to what was being unleashed then. And Pandora's box has not been shut since.

At home in New York, the adults spoke Russian; English with me. No one spoke German,. Everyone, except my cousin and myself, was fluent in French.

A few years earlier, at age eleven or so, I discovered my one great passion of those years: soccer; the real football game. I played for Bar-Kochba Memel, the Zionist sport club. I was a proud left wing on the boys' team and remember kicking the winning 11-meter penalty kick in our 2 to 1 first game victory against Bar-Kochbar Heidekrug. It was not a great victory, however, considering Heydekrug's minuscule Jewish population.



Besides playing and watching soccer, I was also an avid reader of soccer news. My favorite magazine was "Fuszball," published in Munich, which covered the sport internationally and seemed unblemished by German propaganda. This magazine came out weekly and even on the day I was kicked out of school, I remember going directly from school to the newsstand and waiting for the latest edition before taking the steamer to our summer home and informing my family.

Being expelled from school<sup>4</sup> was the reason I left home. Upon arrival in Atlantic City I had another rude shock; soccer was practically non-existent. One year later, in December 1939 when I moved to New York City, I came back to soccer only to leave the sport in 1948 when, at the age of 25, I was much too winded from cigarette smoking to do the necessary running.

## Winter

The sleigh rides were romantic, even to a little boy like myself, although I don't think I knew then what that word meant. My grandmother and I, and maybe a friend of hers, would get into the waiting sleigh. The sun would always shine on these occasions. We would cover ourselves with lap robes. The convertible top would lie folded down behind us. In front and above us sat the coachman, behind the snorting horses whose breath turned to steam in the cold. Sometimes I would sit next to him.

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<sup>4</sup> He was expelled because he was Jewish.



He was a pleasant German who spent the First World War as a Russian captive among Tatars. He taught me a few words of that language, now all forgotten. "The War" always referred to the First World War, and when my grandparents spoke of "peacetimes," this always referred to pre-1914 rather than the early 1930's.

We would start moving when he pulled the whip out of its socket and cracked it. In ten minutes or so we were in the scented pine forest north of the city. Stillness reigned, except for the faint rustling when snow fell of the branches. Naturally, the horses made various noises also, as horses are wont to do, from their mouths and from that part of their anatomy, closest to the driver. Rows of chestnut-sized bells along the shafts and halters were constantly and merrily ringing. The driver sat in front and added a fourth noise; the occasional crack of his whip.

Usually, there were no other tracks except ours, although occasionally small, frightened deer (Rehe) would dart and hop across the road in front of us. The snow was as pure as driven snow should be and stayed on the ground all winter long. This dirt road led to Forsterei (Giruliai), a tiny summer resort near a beach. It was no different from other roads in the country; not a single one with a hard surface.

A favorite winter sport for us boys was hitching our individual sleighs to the backs of passing horse-drawn sleighs, usually those hauling goods. We'd run up from behind; the snow and the bells of the big sleighs deafening any noise of ours. As soon as the drivers spotted us, mostly because of their own speed being reduced, they'd crack the whip in our direction, and we would let go. This diversion, I think, lasted until I was about nine years old.

### Two Christmas reminiscences

It was the first night of Chanukah, about 1929. We were celebrating in our house, Alexander Strasze 19, with grandparents and other family members. There was a lot of laughter, music, food and presents. My father told me that Mrs. Anker, who lived on a first floor apartment with her little son and her mother, had invited me to share their Christmas eve. I didn't want to visit the Ankers, but had to go, of course. Parental orders at the age of seven or so, are parental orders. Old Mrs. X was the widow of a former mayor. Her daughter, Mrs. Anker, was lame in one leg, divorced, and sour. The boy was a year younger than I.



Their apartment, across from my grandfather Sundel's apartment, was dark. I suppose they were enjoying their candle-lit Christmas tree. It was gloomy. There were some gifts for the boy. Then the old lady sat down at the grand piano and played Christmas songs which sounded just as morbid to me then as they do now. I couldn't wait to leave.

About a year later, I remember the first Christmas celebration at Ferdinandplatzschule, my primary school. Again, the decorated tree with lit candles and the religious songs. For entertainment, there was a projector which threw slides of picture stories onto the classroom wall. Then came the gift giving. As was the custom, the parents of the well-to-do children had furnished gifts for the poor children. The latter then lined up to receive those gifts from the teacher, Herr Schwil. These gifts consisted of such items as a single pair of socks. I felt that there was something rotten with this type of celebration, where little boys were practically pilloried for poverty.

These two instances shaped my early views of Christianity. At home there was never a derogatory mention made of any group. As a matter of fact, none of my parents or grandparents ever used an oath or curse word in my presence. My Aunt Eda told me that when she was angry she felt terribly repressed because she lacked the words to express her feelings. At home, propriety and politeness reigned supreme.

But prejudice and hate, born out of the former, were seething beneath the surface! The three groups, mutually antagonistic, were the Germans, the Jews and the Lithuanians. The fact that the Germans were predominantly Protestants and the Lithuanians were Roman Catholic didn't help matters either between them. But since both were nurtured by the New Testament; almost 2,000 years of virulent and violent anti-Semitism, especially fostered in the Gospels of Sts. Matthew and Luke; exploded and resulted in Lithuania's Holocaust, when Hitler gave the order. Why the majority of Danes and Bulgarians behaved differently is well worth studying.

Although my best friend during my early teens was Raimutis Liormonas, son of the military governor of the Memel territory, this relationship was an exception to the rule. And the mixing of different religious and ethnic individuals in the United States became a source of great pleasure to me and still is. How different from the murky atmosphere of most of Europe.

The last time I saw Raimutis was in September 1938 when my mother, sister and I visited the Liormonas home in Raseiniai. Col. Liormonas had been transferred there as military governor because of pressure from the German government who were unhappy with his anti-German attitude. We went by car and arrived in the afternoon. It was the family farm and Raimutis and I slept in a hayloft. Pictures were taken and there is one on the piano of my mother, sister, Mrs. Liormonas and Dangute, Raimutis' sister, as well as us boys. I was quite moved when I parted. He was a good person and fine friend.



And now, for the end of the story. About 1958, in Tokyo, a young soldier was working in my branch. Because his name was Zukauskas and accent, I asked him where in Lithuania he came from. He said "Kretinga," also a town where your mother's relatives lived.<sup>5</sup> I then asked him if he knew the Liormonas family. He did, indeed, and told me the story.

Raimutis was shot the first day of the German invasion of Russia. I asked who shot him. Zukauskas said the Germans, but by mistake. Raimutis was on a truck with Lithuanian partisans, hunting Russians. The Lithuanians hated Russians more than Germans. The Germans mistook the partisans for anti-Germans. After the war, Raimutis's parents and sister emigrated to the U.S. where Dangute married a Professor Klimas. I never tried to establish contact.

### White and Black Idyll

A convertible of winter  
In the days before the car  
Drawn by horses; bells a-ringin  
Lacquered black sleigh gliding far.

From the city through the forest,  
Nature's loudest noise a hush.  
Just the falling of the snowflakes  
from the trees. The sleigh does rush;

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<sup>5</sup> In the text, my father is addressing me and referring to Vera's (his wife's) family, who also were originally from Lithuania.



But the snow absorbs all sound now.  
Then the coachman's whip does crack.  
Horses snort and startled deer bound  
Out across the pure white track.

The snow again lies soft and still.  
Pines perfume the air with scent.  
Not a sign of man or beast now,  
only tracks show that they went.

## Summer

We left school about one o'clock on a typical weekday in June and walked to the Dange River. There we boarded the small steamer that crossed the bay to Sandkrug (Smiltyne), our summer home. On the steamer, we met friends and relatives from the other schools. There may have been fifteen of us altogether.

Crossing the bay was spent either on deck or below in the only cabin. On deck, we watched the harbor sights; the most magnificent of which were the rare millionaires' yachts, usually gold-trimmed white vessels, often with raked bows, masts and funnels, making for a highly rakish appearance. However, the American Ambassador to the USSR, Davies, had the most imposing yacht; all black and a sight evocative of pirate



days; especially when she had her sails set. The largest of these sleek vessels may not have been more than 1,000 tons in size.

The harbor was not deep enough to shelter ships of more than about 3,000 tons. Largest of these were two ivory-painted German tourist ships, which arrived in the early evening, emitting the loudest sounds heard in Memel; four or more tremendous prolonged burps. This happened usually while we were eating supper on the veranda; whereupon my Aunt Ruth and I would break out in loud laughter.

More exciting than the yachts were the all-sail training vessels, especially a fully rigged one from Argentina. It had a largely Indian crew; the first Indians I had ever seen. My father greeted one of them, which impressed me greatly, especially when the Indian returned his greeting. Disappointment set in, however, when my father told me that he had not met the sailor before. I had only one other such disappointment in my father. This happened when I found out that the full-sized tiger skin with head and teeth and claws, which served as a rug, did not result from his hunting activities, but was bought in a store.

The pre-World War I Russian battleship "Marat" had too deep a draft and anchored outside the moles of the harbor. I believe that the officers' cabins were on the deck below the crew's quarters. The British "Orion," the size of a small World War II destroyer escort, carried a single-engine seaplane, which the crew catapulted into the air; to me, a most amazing technical feat. To add to our enjoyment, the plane flew low over the beach, just outside the reach of our quoits.

I should also mention that one of the smaller sailing vessels to visit Memel one summer represented the fledgling Zionist fleet, maybe the only Palestinian vessel of that time.

Lithuanian sea power was represented by the coal-burning flagship, the "Prezidentas Antanas Smetana," a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian minesweeper. As outstanding features it possessed a huge officers' cabin on deck, much too large for such a small vessel; topped by a gleaming British Sten gun, polished to an unbelievable degree of brilliance. The ship's captain cut an imposing figure in his uniform and with his forked black beard a la the German Grand-Admiral von Tirpitz. One would see the "P.A.S." approaching from miles away. Since there were no active volcanoes in the Baltic near Memel, we always knew it was the ship when a huge black pall of smoke appeared on the horizon.

The larger cargo vessels in the harbor loaded such goods as lumber for Germany and other countries, flax for England and horses for Denmark. All sorts of manufactured goods were the main imports. A bucket dredge kept the harbor from silting. Tugs, sailboats, kayaks, motorboats and large sailing cargo barges completed the shipping of the port, except that in winter, iceboats skimmed along the surface much faster than any summer traffic.



Two regattas were held in summer; one for sailboats and the other for sculls. On the mid-summer night, "Johannisnacht," rice paper lamps lit up all the smaller vessels crusing in the bay, while the only Memel fireworks would be crackling, sputtering and fizzling in the not-quite dark sky.

So much for staying on deck while crossing the bay. If we spent the time below deck, it was in the smallish cabin ringed by a bench. A four-inch diameter structural pole in the middle of the cabin was a wonderful vehicle for climbing. My Aunt Ruth, 3 years older than I, was probably the most agile performer. We would devise competitions such as climbing without the use of legs or feet or climbing while carrying our heavy leather knapsacks filled with books. These knapsacks for carrying on the back were obligatory for grades 1 through 4 to improve posture.

Disembarking in Sandkrug, boys and girls separated. We took the high road, a path through the edge of the pine forest along the bay above the narrow dirt road that the girls walked on. Just before we came to the first villa, which was ours, we formed a close circle for our ceremonial pee. The object was to hit a spot on the ground. This ritual satisfactorily completed, we continued on our way, much relieved.

Sometimes we stopped first at the only hotel, (Kurhaus), really an inn, to watch the action on the tennis courts. Long white pants, white shoes and polo shirts were de rigueur for the men and similar all-white attire for the ladies.

In those simpler years we tried to find our amusement wherever we could. Occasionally we had a good laugh on Mafri Becker, short for Maria Friedericke – what a name for a nice Jewish girl! Actually, she was a drab creature. The original Maria Friedericke must have been quite gay. If not, she should have been. Anyhow, Mafri was saddled with this unfortunate appellation by her patriotic German-Jewish, beefy and lack-luster father. Mafri's big hangup was a deadly fear of black bird feathers, obviously a condition with Freudian implications. Black bird feathers were not that rare in Sandkrug, due to the local raven population. Upon finding such a feather, we would run up to Mafri and shout "Kukmal Mafri was ich inder hand hatbe."

Whereupon, she would burst out screaming. Then the other girls became angry at us and we would have to look for something else to keep us amused.

Mafri emigrated to Brazil and if a black feather didn't get her, she is probably still alive and screaming.

In summer we lived in a gingerbread house on the Kurische Nehrung, a sandbar, a 15-minute ferryride from memel. The house faced the city across the lagoon. I remember the great pleasure I felt every morning upon waking when I put on black trunks (I don't remember ever seeing any other color trunks) and Turnschuhe, black slippers akin to ballet shoes. And then, out of the second floor window and down the iron fire escape and down the grassy embankment to the water. I think I was always the



first one up; not long after sunrise. Temperatures must have hovered in the low 60's; I remember the cool mornings, but I don't remember ever needing a shirt.

The water's edge was rocky with a small pier, and the choice of activities for a lone 8-year old at that time of the day was quite limited. I could fish with earthworms for bait, dug out of the yard near the water pump; I could catch sticklebacks with a small net; I could make boats out of reed blades and watch them sail with the wind; or I could skip pebbles across the water.<sup>6</sup> But no matter what, I remember always feeling great down there.

Breakfast came later, but I can't remember a single morning meal. Most likely, anticipation of fun and games at the beach has obliterated all memories of breakfast. At about 9:30, everyone walked to the beach. The beach was about a 15-minute walk behind the house, through a heavily-scented pine forest. Before reaching the beach, one came to the dunes. Boards led across the dunes to a wide white cool beach.

I was home. That beach was my favorite world. Everything I needed was there except for books. My family, friends, balls, quoits, plus that magnificent fine white sand and cold Baltic Sea water. Anyhow, I couldn't have read books at the beach even if I had brought any. Nature was much too distracting and fascinating. By now the air temperature must have risen to the upper sixties. Water temperature was only in the high fifties. I often wondered why so few adults were in the water compared to the many children.

What gave an added dimension to those magnificent summers was their shortness before the onset of the long falls and winter in the city. To me, these were two almost separate existences: beach versus cobblestoned streets; warmth, sunshine and redolent pines against darkness, cold, school and gloomy big-leaved linden and other deciduous trees. And then there was an almost palpable threat in that city. I felt it even as a small boy; an evil spirit emanated from the people.

Nor was I the only one to feel that way. A cousin of my mother told me that when he went to England in the late '20's to attend university, he felt freedom in the air for the first time in his life. I certainly could tell the difference when I came to the United States in December 1938 as a 15-year old. People were nice, and even though there was still a depression and poverty, there was no hint of hatred or threat in the air.

And that is how it remained.

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<sup>6</sup> Daddy taught me to skip pebbles in Japan. He explained that they had to be a certain, smooth and elongated shape and the wrist action had to be done with a snap. His always skipped farther and with more force than mine.



*I found this poem while looking through Daddy's papers the night he died. He had a sticky note on it with "Kar" written on it, so he meant it for me. It captures summer.*

A feeling of well-being;  
Reclining on the beach;  
Warm sand serves as the mattress,  
Wave roar drowns human speech.

The sandman does his duty.  
Eyes close and limbs grow slack.  
A few sheep clouds move slowly,  
A wave will arch its back.

Another one does follow.  
It too with a white crown.  
The water slowly rises.



A seagull swoops, plops down.

The sleeper fanned by breezes;  
Relaxes in the sand.  
He came by gentle stages  
To Never-never Land.

But as the tide is turning  
And lapping up the shore  
Watch out, you idle dreamer;  
You'll wake up wet and sore.

### The Ancestors

Daddy annotated the following excerpt from *Jerusalem* by Martin Gilbert, Viking-Penguin, 1985. It tells the tale of one of his ancestors, Samuel Salant. Daddy prized reverence of family and of the past and believed it was the duty of every Jew to remember and respect his or her family's past.

“...Each year, Jews arrived (in Jerusalem) to swell the numbers, and the crush; theirs was by far the fastest growing community, even though it was divided into several groups, often hostile to each other, especially across the divide between the Ashkenazi, or “German” Jews from eastern Europe and Russia, and the Sephardi, or “Spanish” Jews from the Ottoman Empire and North Africa.

“Among the newly arrived Ashkenazi Jews in 1838 was one of the most learned Russian Jews of the time, Joseph Sundel<sup>7</sup> who had been sent by the Jews of Vilna to be

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<sup>7</sup> Grandfather of my grandfather Sundel



the rabbi of the ‘Vilna’ Jews in Jerusalem. Sundel had accepted the appointment; but being a man of profound modesty, he refused to support his religious work from communal funds and soon after his arrival he opened a vinegar factory in the city, in order to be self-supporting.

“Three of Rabbi Sundel’s daughters<sup>8</sup> married Russian Jews who decided to live in Jerusalem: Uri Shabbetai, who was to become a member of the Jerusalem religious court or Beth Din; Nathan Nata Natkin,<sup>9</sup> one of those Jerusalem Jews who served the community by traveling throughout Europe in search of charitable donations; and Samuel Salant<sup>10</sup>, who was to be Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the city from 1878 to 1909.

“Within the city walls, the late 1830’s had been a time of renewed activity. In 1836, the Ashkenazi Jews bought, from an Arab, the ruins of the eighteenth century Hurva synagogue, and were given permission to build a new synagogue on the ruins.<sup>11</sup>

“...Also, in 1849, in the Jewish quarter ... a Jewish religious school, the Etz Hayyim or “Tree of Life”, was established. The language of instruction was Yiddish...Among the founders of the Tree of Life academy was Samuel Salant, the 25-year-old son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph Sundel, who had been sent to Jerusalem four years earlier as head of the community of Jews from Vilna. Samuel Salant had been born near Bialystock, and had studied in the famous Jewish religious academies of Vilna and Volozhin. On his way from Russia to Palestine, Salant had stopped for some while at Constantinople, where he met and befriended Sir Moses Montefiore.

“As soon as Salant reached Jerusalem Joeseph Sundel vacated his rabbinical office in his son-ion-law’s favor. Salant was to serve the Ashkenazi Jews of Jerusalem for the next sixty-nine year,s until his death, at the age of 93, in 1909. As rabbi of the ‘Vilna’ community, and later as Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazi Jews in the city, Salant was noted for his opposition to extreme orthodoxy, his search for the plain rather than the over-subtle meaning of religious doctrine, for his power of decision, and for decisions tending towards leniency and moderation.”

The preceding gives some background as to the kind of people Daddy’s family were.

*Daddy’s Uncle David, his father’s brother, escaped from Lithuania with his Great-Aunt Ljuba (the daughter of his mother’s father, Israel Salant). They moved to South Africa and finally settled in Chicago. When Uncle David died, Daddy received this eulogy from Rabbi Ira Sud, Emeritus, Congregation Ezra-Habonim, Chicago I read it in Daddy’s memory at a service I held at my house for Daddy, because it applies to him as well.*

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<sup>8</sup> One was my great-grandmother Chaya

<sup>9</sup> My grandfather’s father (He changed his name to escape the military)

<sup>10</sup> Adopted my grandfather when he married the widowed Chaya

<sup>11</sup> When Mommy and Daddy visited Jerusalem in the 90’s, they stumbled upon this synagogue, where my great-great-great grandfather was the rabbi.



Dear Family and Friends –

We are met to pay tribute to the outstanding man, David M Hirschberg, who has been called to eternal rest at the age of 88. In Psalm 90, we read: “Three score and ten our years may number”; that is known as the “Biblical Age”. And: “Four score years if granted the vigor.” Dear David was privileged to rise above the four-score years, almost filling the ninth decade.

He was born at Brionistan (Brinoshka), in East Prussia, Germany. As you know, Jews in that part of Europe lived between Germany and Poland and had certain privileges not granted Jews in other parts of Europe.

He married his beloved Ljuba in 1920; that was 57 years ago. They lived a very happy and action-filled life. In 1934, shortly after our enemies had taken over power, they moved to South Africa. They came to these United States in 1950.

Mr. Hirschberg served with great distinction on the staff of the College of Jewish Studies and Board of Jewish education, 14 years. The College became later the Spertus College of Judaica, where he served four more years until his retirement. It was my great privilege of having met him while I did serve on the Board of CJS and BJE. We had many scholarly conversations.

I believe that his personality was influenced by genetic factors. His late Mother, Zichronah li-v'racha, was Ida Lachs. One of his Grandfathers built the first Jewish flour mill in Jerusalem, decades ago. One of his Grandmothers was a niece of HaRav Shmuel Shalant, the first Ashkenazi Chief- Rabbi in Jerusalem. Farther back an ancestor was the famous Rabbi Israel Salanter, of Kovno, Lithuania. Rabbi Salanter lived from 1810 to 1883; he died some 6 years before David was born. Let me quote several genetic factors from Rabbi Salanter's heritage: “Under the influence of Rabbi Israel Salanter there developed a whole group of students who refrained from conversation over long periods, in order to discipline themselves against the sin of ‘evil speech.’”

Source: The Jews: ed. L. Finkelstein, vol. IV, p. 1336.

“Reb. Israel Salanter, when he learned that his son had gone to Berlin to study medicine, removed his shoes, and sat down on the ground to observe shivah.”

Source: Haskalah Movement, by Raisin, p. 241.

“Rabbi Israel Salanter was the central figure among the religious leaders of the Musar Movement...his problems were: Jewish living and Jewish character.” Musar movement stands for ethical movement, ethical works. “...he feared that external influences might leave the traditional observances unfortified by emotion and thus make piety something mechanical, and talmudic study a matter of personal vanity rather than a sign of religious devotion.”



Source: A History of the Jews, by Grayzel, P. 612-3.

All sources quoted were published by the JPS in Philadelphia.

As one of his family said: "David Hirschberg was a link to the past."

He was a well-liked man, a kind man. Every week he wrote letters to nephews and nieces in many places: South Africa, South America, Israel, England, Washington, D.C., etc. His hobby was playing the piano.

We can say of him: "Edel Sei der mensch, hilfreich, und gut." That means: Let a man be noble of character, helpful and good. So was David.<sup>12</sup>

Before closing with the "El Mole Rachamin," I want to read a few lines from words written some 2,000 years ago, by Ben Sira; this is due to the presence of several young people here:

"Fear not death; we are destined to die. We share it with all who ever lived, with all who ever will be. Bewail the dead, hide not your mourning. But remember that continuing sorrow is worse than death. When the dead are at rest, let their memory rest, and be consoled when the soul departs.

"Seek not to understand what is too difficult for you, search not for what is hidden from you. Be not over-occupied with what is beyond you, for you have been shown more than you can understand.

"As a drop of water in the sea, as a grain of sand on the shore are man's few days in eternity. The good things in life last for limited days, but a good name endures forever."

David Hirschberg left a good name, indeed.

"Oh, God, our Father, you redeem our souls from the grave,  
You are the Rock of our salvation. Forsake us not in time of trouble,  
in days of distress and desolation.  
Help us to endure, O Lord, for we have placed our hope in You.

Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> See notes on Daddy's father.



## Over the Years

I have written personal reminiscences, vignettes, descriptions; yet all of it is part of history as well. Family history is dear to me because I believe in the continuity of my heritage. It is my connection with past and future generations. I have never thought of myself as just an individual, but rather as a link in a human chain reaching back into a far distant past and hoping that it continues into the distant future.

My family, with two exceptions, have lived in Lithuania and East Prussia probably since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the borderlands were opened to Jews; most of whom came from German lands. One exception is my mother's father's father, Israel Moishe,. According to his oldest son, my great uncle Faiwel, this great grandfather came from the Caucasus. His youngest child, my great aunt Ljuba, told me when she was in her late 90's, that her father spoke Yiddish with a different accent than anyone else, and that he said he came from a place much farther away than Petersburg or Moscow. Obviously, geography was not her strong point. Most likely, he came from Russian Azerbaijan or neighboring Chechniaya or Ingushetia; where many primitive Jewish mountain groups named Tat had lived in isolation; in contrast to the Georgian Jews who were as advanced culturally as the Christian population of Georgia. Lithuanian Jews had adopted individual Tat Jews already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This greatgrandfather married a



Bialek and lived in Vorne (Varniai) and Laukuva; both Lithuanian villages. He was a typical businessman of those days, owning a bakery, a general store and the right to all the fish of the Vorne lake. Every year, traveling Siberians would net the fish, which were then dried and sold. His features were somewhat Mongolian. From all accounts he was as tough as he looked. To give an example: My great grandmother would prepare food to give the poor for the Sabbath. She instructed her youngest daughter, Ljuba and Sorga, to deliver the food, but do it secretly. My great grandfather was opposed to such largesse.

My father's father's father emigrated from the Lithuanian village of Shalant (Salantai) to Jerusalem about 1840. He owned the first Jewish flour mill in Jerusalem. He was given the surname Hirschberg so that he wouldn't be drafted by the Russian Army. Single sons were exempt from the draft, which, at that time meant a service of 25 years. (See Alexander Herzen's account of meeting Jewish draftees of 12 years and younger being driven in winter on forced marches into the interior of Russia.) According to my grandfather Sundel, his father translated Don Quixote into Hebrew and spent a year in Rome studying at the Vatican Library. He died young and his widow,<sup>13</sup> married the widower Reb Shmuel Salant, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, who adopted my grandfather. My grandfather had a twin brother who died shortly after birth (about 1869) and a younger brother who was married five times; and outlasted four of his wives. He had two daughters and one son; not much for five marriages.

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<sup>13</sup> Chaya, my great grandmother, daughter of Joseph Sundel of Salant, whoetc. He was called "the Ethical Man" by Yisrael Salanter, he founder of the Musaf movement.



### My Mother's Mother's Mother

In 1927 or 1928, I was standing with my family at my great-grandmother's bedside. I must have been told that she was dying. My great-grandmother, whose name I can't recall, lived with her son Moses, his wife Minna, and their pretty daughter Feige in a small, extremely clean and sunshiny house, very much like an English cottage, across the street from Memel's main synagogue, the Beth Hamidrash.

The sunshine was streaming through the lace curtains. My great-grandmother was propped up in bed. Her complexion was pink and white and on her head she wore a white lace cap. She looked serene and spoke a little. The room was quiet, but there may have been some discreet sobbing.

Next morning, her maid, all dressed in black, called at our house to inform us that my great-grandmother had died. She had to visit the homes of all other relatives as well, because my great-uncle Moses had no telephone. My great-grandmother was about 85 years old, having been born in the 1840's. That visit to her bedside has remained with me as a pleasant memory.

Besides Moses, she had another son, Mordechai, who fought for the British in the Boer War, and two daughters: Sarah-Michaela and Betty (Broche), my grandmother. I was named after her husband, my great-grandfather Osher Joffe. Mordechai left South Africa and lived in Memel, being married to Renee Gadiel's<sup>14</sup> aunt Kianne nee

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<sup>14</sup> Renee was married to Peter Gadiel. Her family lived in Tauerlocken, a farm., more of which is described in another chapter.



Silbermann. Her other daughter-in-law, my great-aunt Minna, with whom she lived, was an exuberant, kind woman, fond of huge decolletees, rouged to heighten the effect of her imposing front. Her laugh was a slightly subdued turkey gobble.

May they all rest in peace!

### My Mother's Father

My mother's father, Jakob, was born in 1879, the second of three sons. He also had four sisters. As follows: Faiwel, Yankel, Herman Jaff of South Africa, Ite Silberman, Beile Katzin, Sonia Pomeranz and Ljuba Hirschberg.

His father bore a remarkable resemblance to Lenin, but he had even stronger Mongolian features than the latter. One story had it that his family came from the Caucasus (maybe Daghestan, Azerbaijan or Chechnya).

My great grandfather was a businessman who exploited an opportunity when he saw one. I know that he owned a bakery, held fishing rights to a lake, dealt in Baltic sardines (sprats) and also dealt in lumber. His children spoke highly of him.

My great grandmother, nee Bialik (his wife), was a kind person. He did not like her to give to the poor.

Jakob, his son, served three years in the Russian Army and was a sweet and gentle man with only religious education. He was extremely meticulous and fastidious about his person. He would wash his feet first before going into his daily tub bath. He loved nature and, I felt as a boy, that he thirsted for knowledge; but it was a chore for him to read anything except Yiddish and Hebrew. The finest, and probably largest paper in the Baltic States was the *Eidishe Shtimme*, the Yiddish newspaper published in Kovno. And so, despite his lack of other languages he certainly was well-informed about current events.

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This sweet and modest man was taken by the Germans soon after they entered Kovno, and tortured to death.

### Tauerlauken

Some of my fondest childhood memories center on Tauerlauken, my Great Uncle Mjle (Moole; short for Samuel) Silbermann's farm. It was large, about 3,000 Morgen (6,000 acres) three miles from the city and comprised heath, woods, fields, pasture, gardens and the usual barns, ponds, storage buildings, with a wooden two-story gray farm house. My Great Aunt Ite was my mother's father's oldest sister. Three of their four children lived on the farm: Boris and Sasha (the latter worked full time on the farm, while Boris was a businessman in town) and their younger daughter, Renee, who was called Baby by all.

The main building had two wings, a second story attic of wood construction and little peasant houses for the workers near by. The only electricity came from a car battery to run the radio. There was a pond for the cattle to drink at; there was also a lot of fowl and a hunting dog, Tasso, as well as a cat to take care of the mice. Water came from a well, since there was no indoor plumbing. The outhouse, really an "inhouse" at one end of the building, had an extremely deep pit that never needed draining.

The property dated from the mid-thirteenth century when it became the fief of a crusader knight from the order of "Schwertbruder," a branch of the Teutonic knights, named Klaus Turlack; hence Tauerlacken. These knights fought the heathen Lithuanians for 50 years or so, but never conquered or converted them. Tauerlacken, by the way, was one hour's walk from Memel. Every few hours a bus would go North from Memel to Palanga and would stop at Tauerlauken, if requested. Going back at night, one would see the gleam of the headlights to the North and then leave the house for a 200 or 300 meter walk to the gravel highway (there was no other traffic at night).



One large room in the main house served as the local primary school, and the teacher, a young Lithuanian woman, boarded with the Silbermann's. Also boarding there was a friend of the family, a Mr. Samuel Burenstein, an elderly, highly erudite gentleman of no visible or invisible means; who was a self-invited but welcome guest, serving as a one-man entertainment and education committee. You see, Tauerlaucken, although only an hour's walk from the city, was isolated and the Silbermanns craved company.

Mr. Burenstein, a friend of the family, announced one day on a visit to Tauerlaucken, that he had lost his job as accountant to Dr. Enlin's firm and would like to stay a few days until he found another position. This may have been early in 1937. By December 1938, when I left for the U.S., he was still a houseguest. Mr. Burenstein was an intellectual from a fine Riga or Liban family. His knowledge was vast: languages, science, mathematics, odd topics like the history and culture of the gypsies, etc. He was charming and a great conversationalist. Of course, he didn't lift a finger except to feed and dress himself and, yes, to play cards. But none of the men worked in the house.

If there was no poker or other game, he played solitaire while humming through an entire repertoire of Yiddish and Russian songs. This could last for hours. After all, the pace of Tauerlaucken was not that of the New York Stock Exchange.

Gambling went on only on Sundays when guests came from Memel by bus, on foot or Drosky. Being penniless, he would pocket any winings but wouldn't pay his losses. Nevertheless, he was accepted by all and sundry in Tauerlaucken as a positive addition to the household.

Mr. Brunestein, who was in his 70's, Martin Katzin, a 30ish cousin of my mother and I, (12-15 years old) would take long walks. Marin, a brilliant, diminutive man, had a tragic life; married with child; emigrated to Israel before the war; loved his wife and she loved him; but all for naught. He drank to excess and died alone in Montreal in the 70's.

I enjoyed those conversations but can't remember anything we discussed except one learned dissertation by Mr. Burenstein on gypsies.

But there was so much else to do in Tauerlauken. In summer one could walk down the high wooded bank and swim in the River Dange. At harvest time I was allowed to work the one-horse harrowing cart. Sometimes I could ride around the farm on a horse, named Olga. During the hunting season, I accompanied my Cousin Boris and his setter Tasso when he went shooting. He hunted for deer, red fox, hare and Rebhuhn (quail), and the entrance of the main house was hung with various antlers of deer he had shot.

The Silbermanns loved people and it seems that every weekend I was there droves of friends and relatives came from town, either walking or driving or taking the bus that passed Tauerlauken on the way north. I once stayed on the farm for six weeks when my sister had scarlet fever or measles and was never bored.



Memel, on the other hand, was quite boring.

The food eaten in Tauerlauken was practically all from the farm. Maybe even the Dektinys (Vodka). I remember good solid farm food but nothing fancy. Bread was baked in the kitchen; solid, heavy pumpernickel. Butter and sour cream was also made in the huge kitchen. Outside were the chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese waiting for table scraps and grain or potatoes.

### On Writing, Reading, Heroes and Sex

In my first or second year of school I began to write verse. Possibly I had already read Heine, whose poems are very melodious, deceptively simple, smooth-flowing and witty. I wrote about nature: flowers, trees, etc. Then came my masterpiece about Moses. My second grade teacher, Frau Kwauka, asked for the poems which I entered into a little notebook. She would read them to the other teachers.

My parents thought this rhyming was queer and probably thought I could become so, too. Somehow, I lost the notebook. I still suspect my father. From then on, he would guide my poetic efforts into a more appropriate channel, much to my chagrin, namely dedicatory verses for such events as birthdays of great aunts, etc. The last poem I wrote at his insistence was in celebration of my Great Uncle Joseph Kahn's receiving the Order of Vytautas Didysis, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Class from the Lithuanian government, presumably for his services as Kantor of the "Deutsche Synagogue" and high school religious teacher. I wrote the poem in green ink, in Gothic style letters on special vellum paper.

My father died shortly thereafter as did my poetic efforts. The fact that my instincts have always been heterosexual, I ascribe not to my father's intervention in my creative efforts, but rather to the fact that nature meant me to be a Goethe and not a Shakespeare.

Before I reached my eighth birthday I also had my earliest intimation of the fair sex as the fair sex. Her name was Eva M. and we had our initial chance brief encounter playing hide and seek at her birthday party. Appropriately enough for that age, it was under the bed where we found each other.

We continued with little necking trysts here and there; I can recall one in our garden in the city. But then our parents must have gotten wind of these goings-on; probably through our kinderfraulein, and we didn't see each other anymore. I also remember being very jealous at that time of a nerd, named Bubi F., who lived close to Eva.



When I was in the second grade, my father brought home a magnificent edition of the book "Sagen des Klassischen Altertums" (Myths of Classical Antiquity") by Gustav Schwab. The book was beautifully bound, large, thick; and contained numerous Picasso-esque line drawings. The stories were all about ancient Greece, its gods, demigods, heroes, goddesses, ladies and children.

I read all of the tales in this heavy book many times and felt very familiar in that old world. I preferred the story of the Trojan War over all others because it was a full account of many facets, participants, over a long period of time, and the protagonists were clearly drawn; whereas the Labors of Hercules, for example, dealt with one rather blank super-human.

My hero worship of the Ancient Greeks declined considerably when I became an adult and when my own Jewish heritage showed me the moral void of the Greek sagas. At that time, too, I began to realize the almost miraculous circumstances which resulted in the formation of the United States by the great founders and its incredibly humane government, far ahead of anything anywhere.

And so I added the U.S. founding fathers as my heroes and have no problem in combining my love for Jewry and Israel with my love for the United States.

My father bought a new book for me almost daily at the Buchhandlung Krips, the Memel bookstore, located at the Borsenbrücke (Stock Exchange Bridge). Few books fascinated me as much as this one. And it was this book which first kindled my appetite for history and pre-history. My father was an excellent guide in shaping and developing my intellectual life, mostly through choosing the right books.

By the time I was eight years old, he had decided that I should become an archaeologist. And he was correct. However, years later, when I started college at the ripe old age of 23, I chose geography as my major rather than archaeology. The main reason was that making a living as a geographer seemed more assured; but, I confess that belated filial revolt played a role in my decision as well.

As a result of that early plunge into Greek antiquity, Roman gods and history seemed a rehash, especially because of the lack of an Iliad and Odyssey. The Aeneid seemed a poor second, at least. Roman gods had different names, but their attributes were pretty much identical with the Greek originals. I suppose that the Romans, enamored of Greek antiquity themselves, changed their own gods to fit into the Greek pantheon.

Living in town had one great advantage: books. I became addicted to books before I could read. I was read to by our kinderfraulein. One day she told me that she would no longer read to me and that I now was able to read by myself. This was during her rendition of one of Hugh Lofting's Dr. Doolittle books in German translation. To my chagrin, my parents agreed with her. It was quite a few years later that I found out that



the curious beast in Dr. Doolittle's menagerie was not a Stoszmichziehdich, bur really was the Push-me-pull-you. Anyhow, our maid was right; I could read and I haven't stopped since.

Probably the first book I read was by Sophie Reinheimer; something about flowers, and, I felt, quite treacly. It couldn't have been too much later, however, that I made the quantum leap to books without illustrations. One birthday, my cousin Tamara presented me with a copy of Robinson Crusoe. I was nonplussed when I leafed through it. There were no pictures. But when I started reading, the lack of illustrations was forgotten. Another book became a favorite only after I had seen the movie with Wallace Beery. This was Stevenson's Treasure Island. No other movie has ever given me as much delight as that one. I saw it only one time. Children could go to the movies once a week and because the movie run in Memel was quite short, another picture was playing at the Kapitol one week later. I felt terribly disappointed; maybe even more than at the inconclusive conclusion of my first love affair.

I had never given much or intense thought as to what, if any, books I read as a child, affected me greatly or even played a part in my mental and psychological makeup, until I read Teddy Kollek's Autobiography. He mentioned the great influence the German writer of adventure stories, Karl May, had on him. It so happens that I read all of May's books at least once, and that is no mean achievement because he must have written many more than fifty. I loved his books, especially the majority which were about the Wild West right after the Civil War. As a boy, my father was not allowed to read them, because in his youth, pre-World War I, they were considered schundromane (trash literature).

Upon rereading some of them for the first time in 1978, I was extremely pleased to find May's writing lucid and fluid, with fast-moving, believable plots, great attention to technical details, a naïve but not malign patriotism (German, of course); in short, the writings of a decent man. The German hero would play tricks but he would never cheat. Nor did I come across slurring references to any group or nation except the "bad" Indian tribes, who his German hero fought together with his Indian blood brother, Chief "Winnetou" (Volumes I, II and III). However, May also had southern villains. He clearly took the Union side in the Civil War.

When I read Karl May's books, between the ages of 10 to 15, all I seem to remember is the adventure portion. The patriotic German aspect, the decency of the author's outlook on life may have passed me by and probably did, as did the boy scout flavor in which these stories were written. And upon rereading the first two Winnetou books again it was the adventures which were the highlights, albeit nicely rounded out by the author's technical expertise and pleasant, if juvenile humor and patriotism.

The remarkable aspect of May's books is the fact that the author, who wrote mostly in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, never set foot in the New World. He was a schoolteacher and spent time in jail for forgery or a similar offense.



Some of his books my father bought for me, but most of them I got out of the pay library. I don't think the municipal library carried them. When I realized how good these books were, I began to read them according to thickness, starting with the fattest, possibly over 800 pages, and a few years later, ending with the thinnest, still well over 300 pages.

If any author influenced me, it surely was the poet Heinrich Heine. His witty rhymes attracted my attention early. He was easy reading for a child and cloaked strong emotions and intensely felt views in simple words that made lilting rhymes. He was highly anti-clerical and so was I. I certainly never heard a disparaging remark about clergy at home, not even Christian clergy. He was the only adult who had these views, and he must have formed mine.

Later on, or maybe even when I started reading him, his dislike of Germans gave me great pleasure because it reflected the bloated, sluggish, prissy petit bourgeois Germans who made up the majority of Memel residents and with whom I was in daily contact. At home, I don't remember hearing one word against them as a people.

But I am sure I would not have treasured Heine nearly as much were it not for that light, lyrical quality that pervades all of his writing. It so happens, that until Germany's defeat in 1945, German writing was heavy, heavy and obtuse. Heine was different, a flood of sunshine. And so I could overlook his apostasy, especially since he never seemed to take his conversion to Lutheranism too seriously. However, his Jewish self-hatred bothered me even when I was a child.

Heine's love for the sea also greatly appealed to me, although I knew the sea long before I read Heine.

Heine also introduced me to another one of my boyhood heroes, Napoleon. He idolized him and I, unthinkingly, followed suit. This infatuation was to last until I was in my late teens when I realized that Napoleon was, at least, a very flawed hero. Of course, to Heine, Napoleon meant emancipation from the narrow Ghetto world, and freedom and equality. Although trailing Heine by 125 years, I followed him wholeheartedly then.

Another of my childhood, really a composite hero, were the ancient Greeks with their gods and demigods. My father bought me the "Sagen des Klaassischen Altertums" when I was seven or eight. It was a compilation of Greek mythology by Gustav Schwab with magnificent Picasso-like drawings of scenes and characters. I read all of the tales in this heavy book many times and felt very familiar in that old world. I preferred the story of the Trojan War over all others because it was a full account of many facets, participants, over a long period of time, and the protagonists were clearly drawn; whereas the Labors of Hercules, for example, dealt with one rather blank super-human.

My hero worship of the Ancient Greeks declined considerably when I became an adult and when my own Jewish heritage showed me the moral void of the Greek sagas.



At that time, too, I began to realize the almost miraculous circumstances which resulted in the formation of the United States by the great founders and its incredibly humane government, far ahead of anything anywhere. And so, I added the U.S. founding fathers as my heroes and have no problem in combining my love for Jewry and Israel with my love for the United States.

As a result of having read the Greek sagas, I became more and more interested in history and also geography. At that time, my father suggested to me that I become an archaeologist. I didn't take him up on it, but I believe he was right.

I have listed, not in any order, the books I owned as a boy; all in German and all enjoyed until I left Memel in August 1938 for Kovno and subsequent emigration to the USA in December of 1938.

1001 Nights (Arabian Nights)  
Robinson Crusoe by Dafoe  
All the Dr. Doolittle books by Hugh Lofting  
Sagas of Classical Antiquity (Schwab) on Greece  
Anderson's Complete Marchen (Fairy Tales)  
Don Quixote  
The Eternal Heavenly Blue (by a Czech author)  
Emil and the Detectives  
Punktchen & Anton, both by Erich Kastner  
Various books by Karl May (Adventures in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century among American Indians and mid-east Arabs, Kurds and Turks)  
Taras Bulba by Gogol  
Tartarins of Tarascon by Daudet  
Ivanhoe, Kenilworth, Quentin Durward, etc. by Sir Walter Scott  
Leatherstocking, The Pathfinder, etc. By James Fenimore Cooper  
Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer  
Treasure Island, Kidnapped, etc. by R. L. Stevenson  
Durch dei Weite Welt (Through the Wide World, a yearly with stories, puzzles, sports news, colored foldouts, etc.)  
Science fiction books by Hans Dominick (a former governor of German Southwest Afrika)  
Masterman Ready by Captain Marryat  
Kipling's Jungle Book  
1812 by Achim von Arnim?  
Brave Soldier Schweik by Hasek<sup>15</sup>

There were many others, whose titles and stories are somewhere in the back of my head, together with other inconsequentialia.

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<sup>15</sup> He read this many times, chuckling all the while. When he died, it was on his night table, dog eared, and with pages falling out. The night after he died, his good friend Aram had a laugh about the book they both adored.



## FOOD

One lament was constant throughout the year and that was the excellent food I ate. Too much, of course, and too rich; but real food of an earlier time. Everything, except Portuguese sardines, was bought or grown fresh and the taste was commensurate with that fact. Even my favorite candy, Kuhbonbon, a caramel-cream-sugar bite-size block with a soft center of the same mix, was fresh. One bought it, wrapped, individually in paper, at the dairy.

Although my mother didn't care a whit about food and couldn't even boil eggs, our succession of cooks prepared excellent meals; no doubt, due in large part to my father, who loved food. I remember my mother eating pumpernickel and herring and drinking tea with lemon or cream and sugar, and I believed that, plus an occasional apple was all she needed in the way of food. The diet varied somewhat with the seasons. In late spring and summer we had superb tiny chicks with crisp skins; one would be just right to serve as the main dish for a small boy. Potatoes, a staple in that part of the world, were always perfect, whether boiled, fried or mashed with butter and milk. And they accompanied every main dish, every day. Two other fowl dishes were my favorites; roast goose with red cabbage in winter and those heavy and sweetish purple-meat squabs.

The seafood of the Baltic merits an illustrated book to itself. I know of no other area where smoked seafood approaches that of the Baltic, except for British salmon. My favorite was smoked eel; heavy, fatty, off-white, chewy, firm and great on a real bagel with butter. Almost as good was smoked flounder with its sandpaper skin which you peeled off to get at the pinkish-brown meat which graded into white. Both fish tasted delicately fishy and delicately smoky. And then there were the crayfish (Krebse), about 5 inches long, which were put live into the boiling water and turned red and were eaten with butter and lemon.

Breads and pastries, too, were superb, or ordinary if you knew nothing else. I knew nothing else, of course, and only realized as a teen-ager in Atlantic City that I had left a land of incredible food for an incredible land.



## The Work Ethic

Until I came to the United States, I wasn't really aware that such a concept as the work ethic existed. Only as I got to know Vera<sup>16</sup> and her family, did it slowly dawn on me that here, indeed, was a worthwhile, possibly even necessary rule to be followed. In other words, one not only worked at everyday tasks voluntarily, but actually enjoyed them.

As a child, at home, only the maids and cooks worked. My mother and grandmother never did. They entered the kitchen rarely, much less than I, who as a little boy, liked to watch the preparation of food and was rewarded with tidbits like the leavings of the mixing bowl for cakes. My grandmother's work consisted of crocheting; neither she nor my mother sewed, darned, cleaned although they might have ordered the daily menus. The cook and maid bought the food at the store and twice weekly market. Most of the food was delivered to the house by local farmers.

My father and mother's father went to their sawmill daily; a 30-minute walk each way. My father left about 9:30, after breakfast. At one o'clock we had our main meal; attended by my father, who then took a nap. His afternoon was free to attend café Neumann with its small marble-topped tables, to talk to friends, read the papers fastened to wooden sticks, and drink coffee, cognac and eat cake. The ice cream was excellent but the "weisze dame" tarts were superb.

My father's father, who was 50 when I was born, lived on a small retirement income. His time was spent visiting family, arguing with friends, and playing 501 with them every afternoon.

Cards took up a lot of time. My mother and her parents played bridge; my father, poker, and his mother, who died just before I was born, liked "Mauscheln." As a result of my early conditioning, I just love retirement. Old habits not only don't die hard; they don't even fade away.

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<sup>16</sup> Mommy and Daddy met first before he enlisted in the army, introduced by his cousin Marian. They fell in love after the war when they both attended Hunter College. They married on August 21, 1949. Daddy died less than a month short of their 53<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary



## My Family

*Daddy's father, mother and sister were always uppermost in his mind. He loved them very much, as you will see. He never spoke about their deaths until around 1990, when the USSR split up and information became available about the Lithuanian atrocities during World War II. Thus, he had different stories through the years about the deaths of his mother and sister.*

*I have chosen to leave these stories whole, so the reader can discover the truth as Daddy did.*

## My Father

My father, Laser (Eliezer) Hirschberg was born in Russ, a small town in East Prussia across the border from Russia in 1897, the youngest of four children, to Sundel and Ida (Ite) nee Lachs. His older siblings were David (born 1889); Jeete, born 1894 and Benjamin, who died as a small child. All of the surviving children were highly talented musicians. My father went to grammar school and then had private schooling with a Lutheran clergyman, who taught him also classical Greek and Latin. In 1916 he volunteered for the German Army and became a Meldereiter, cavalry messenger and scout. He advanced and was discharged as sub-lieutenant, having fought both on the western front, including Verdun's Fort Douaumont and the eastern front.

He was wounded four times: shrapnel in upper torso, one ear lobe shot off, shrapnel in throat, shot through the hand, for which he received a bronze medal. He also received the Iron Cross, Second Class, sometime after all his Christian fellow soldiers received theirs. He then took law courses at Carolus University in Koenigsburg, Immanuel Kant's school, and received his Juris Doctor degree. In 1922 he married my mother, Fanny (Feige) nee Jawschitz (Javsicas) in Memel, which was then under French occupation.

I was born August 28, 1923 and my sister Dagmar (Ite) was born July 16, 1925. He was a charming, witty, humorous, elegant man; according to Paloma (his sister in law)<sup>17</sup>, the first cosmopolitan she ever met. He was a voracious reader, and guided my own reading in an exemplary fashion until his early death in 1934. (Whereupon I succumbed to the blandishments of such writers as Max Brand, Zane Grey and Edgar

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<sup>17</sup> One of Fanny's four sisters and my father's aunt. Paloma lived in Argentina and was quite an adventuress in her day.



Wallace, all in German translation). He was a partner in the business of my grandfather Jakob and his brother Feiwel. They owned a sawmill as their prime source of income, but had other manufacturing interests and forest holdings. His sudden death ws attributed to "embolie" (embolism) aggravated by shrapnel finally penetrating the heart region. I think it was a classic case of atherosclerosis brought on by heavy cigarette smoking and an excessively high intake of food rich in cholesterol. He loved food and was overweight but not obese.

He was an excellent dancer and ice skater, but, above all, a fine amateur musician. He could play any instrument and owned and played the following at home: mandolin, accordion, violin, and piano. (We owned a Bluthner concert grand). Several times a week, musicians from town, usually visiting combo groups and local amateurs, would play in our living room in the evening. His mother died shortly before I was born and every jahrzeit he and I would visit her grave at the Jewish cemetery. The latter was made into a soccer stadium by the Germans after removal of the headstones.

Besides German, he was fluent in French, Yiddish and Hebrew and knew some Lithuanian and English. I said Kaddish for him daily at a small shul in the Libauerstrasse, for the required period of eleven months.

My father was about five and a half foot tall and slightly heavy, which didn't interfere with his prowess as a dancer and figure skater. He was a handsome man. He was also witty and charming. He read a great deal, almost always novels, and he certainly was one of the best customers of the Krips bookstore; especially since he frequently also bought books for me. As a junior partner in his father-in-law's lumber business, the largest part of which consisted of a saw-mill, my father went to work late and came home early, to take naps in the afternoon. One reason for this way of life were the wounds he received as a German soldier in the World War. He was wounded three or four times and carried shrapnel in his body when he died. This may have caused his fatal embolism.

He died the day before Chanukah 1934, on the first of December. My father was also a heavy cigarette smoker and he loved fatty foods. Spending money was a favorite pastime of his; the exact opposite of my mother's frugal nature. His outdoor activities were restricted pretty much to fishing in our motor boat "Peter." Every day in summer we would ride in it across the bay and up the River Dange (pronounced Dun-yi) where we would cast anchor and throw our lines for bass, eel and bream.

While moving we would also have lines out for pike. When I was seven or eight, he decided that I should become an archaeologist, based on my nature and interests, and I must say that he hit the nail on the head. He was a lawyer by university training (Koenigsberg) if not by trade, and his motto was Goethe's "Edel sei der Mensch, hilfreich und gut." (Man be noble, helpful and good). And he meant it.



## My Sister

My sister, Dagmar, was a remarkable person; very warm, outgoing, highly intelligent and with a sparkling personality. She was small and round with thick black hair and black eyes, and a small pert nose. She didn't read for pleasure and was not interested in music. She liked playing with her dolls. She was supercharged and when we were small I remember her getting up in the middle of the night and talking and go to her toy box; all this while she was fast asleep. She looked like a doll and was everyone's favorite. This didn't suit me at all, of course, and there was a lot of sibling rivalry.

I heard that she behaved like an angel in the Ghetto; helpful and kind. When the Ghetto was liquidated in 1944 and the surviving Jews sent to the death camps or murdered, she was in a hiding place with other children and teenagers. The Germans or Lithuanians found them and murdered them on the spot.

### My Sister Dagmar (1925 – 1941)

Sparkling black eys, upturned nose.  
Dark curly hair, all smiles.  
Always active, not repose  
And full of girlish guiles.

Walking in her sleep with eyes  
Open wide and talking.  
Ev'rybody's fav'rite, she;  
Except her brother's balking.



## My Mother

My mother, Fanny (Feige) Javsicas (Jawschitz), was born in 1903 in Viezaiciai a hamlet near Gordz, the Lithuanian part of Tsarist Russia a few miles east of the Prussian border. She was the oldest of five daughters. She was a warm and gay person, highly intelligent and extremely witty. Several friends and family told me later that she was the wittiest woman they ever met. Her father nicknamed her "Mommele" (little mother) very early because of her warm and motherly nature.

She was a very good mother to me, and contrary to the nickname given her by my grandfather Jakob, she was never over-bearing as a mother except for the one fetish which she had; namely overdressing her children for fear of their catching cold. This was easy to cope with. All this required was disposing of unnecessary scarves, hats, etc. at the bottom of the nearest closet while on the way out.

With food I had absolute freedom. I could eat as little or as much as I wanted. When certain foods were eaten that I didn't like, such as chicken, a special dish was prepared for me. My mother didn't have too many clothes and liked to wear certain favorites, such as a black dress with a fist-size flower print. Her perfume was Crepe de Chine and her only vice was card-playing, especially bridge. She was one of the best players in town.

Physically, she was small, perhaps 5 feet and one or two inches, pretty with big dark eyes, a big nose, full lips, fine white and pink skin and heavy black hair. She was of average weight and build with slender, well-shaped arms and legs. Probably her least flattering feature was the usual lit cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth. I am sure that her I.Q. was over 140. She laughed frequently and easily and I know of no one who didn't like her. My mother completed high school (Einjaehrige) at the German Lyceum in Memel and then went to a young Jewish ladies' finishing school in Lausanne, Switzerland.

She was shot to death, together with her mother, my Grandmother Betty (Broche) by Germans or Lithuanians in 1942 or 1943 while imprisoned in the Kovno Ghetto.

Her father was Jakob (my favorite grandparent) and mother Betty (Broche) nee Joffe. She was the first of five children, all daughters (much to the chagrin of my grandmother). The others were Eda Kopelman, Helen Hirsch, Taube Happ and Ruth Frey.

My mother was a warm outgoing person, bubbling with good humor and extremely witty, which is always a sign of intelligence. She was much liked by men, although she was not pretty; but she was not a flirt.



She had absolutely no ear for music, although she admitted to loving it when my father played the piano and sang "Am Brunnen ver dem Tore," etc., during their courtship. They had met once as children, when both families were vacationing on the beach of the Kurische Nehrung of Schwarzort (Judkrante). She had no interest in food, very unlike my father; and couldn't cook at all. She could exist on tea with lemon or cream, apples, black bread and herring. She had very few clothes and no real interest in fashions, although I remember sitting with her at a fashion show in Koenigsberg (Kaliningrad). She loved my father very much and was crushed when he died. She and my sister Dagmar, another "Mommeli," were seen last by Renee Gadiel, when they and Renee's parents were sent to slaughter by a German officer, who spared Renee' and Rosel's life for slave labor. He separated them by pointing his whip.

Two instances of her protective attitude come to mind:

Paloma (her sister Taube) mentioned that it was only because of my mother's insistence that their mother allowed Paloma to spend a year in Paris in the late 20's. That was Paloma's greatest year; she had a driver's license, was neighbor of the stunning Prince Yussupoff, Rasputin's killer; she saw Andre Gide on his walks, etc. and had a great time.

Ruth was shielded from my grandmother's wrath for bad report cards, by my mother's interceding. She would arrive from school at our home, on her way to my grandparents' home, howling in pain. I have never since heard such heart-rending howling. My mother would then try to quiet Ruth, call their mother to tell her the tragic news of the bad report card, and send her away, sobbing.

When I mentioned that to Ruth, she first feigned ignorance, and then reluctantly admitted: "Yes, but that was only the first report card in autumn."

These were my dear ones, but what about the others, those millions of saints and martyrs? Most of whom left no one to testify and who are remembered by no one. My boyhood friends, slaughtered together with all of their loved ones.

Who were these boys and girls? Most of them were Zionists. They were incredibly modern by present standards. Clear thinking, forward-looking, strong, direct, inquisitive. Boys and girls mixed freely and easily. How they would have enriched the world by their mere existence! And how they could have strengthened our Holy Land! Before them and in memory of them I bow deeply in love and reverence.



July 21, 1987

This is the story of the death of my mother, Fanny, born 1903 and my sister Dagmar, born 1925.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1941, the Germans assembled all Kovno ghetto Jews by family groups. My mother and sister, her aunt and uncle, Ida and Samuel Silbermann; their pregnant daughter Renee and their daughter-in-law Rosel with her thee-year-old daughter Aviva, were such a group, the remnant of a large family. A German officer went along theses family groups and made the selection. In front of my loved ones, he pointed his riding crop; separating Renee, Rosel and Aviva from the others. My mother and sister and my great uncle and aunt then were led away to be shot or beaten to death by Germans and Lithuanians.

Renee fainted and upon recovering consciousness, a German soldier told her: "Don't worry! They are just going to a different work detail."

This mass murder of 10,000 Kovno Jews was called "Die grosze Aktion."

The Death of my Mother and Sister II



On October 27, 1941, German authorities ordered all 28,000 Kovno ghetto inhabitants to report to Demokratu Square at 6 a.m. on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Any Jews found in their homes that day were to be shot.

At 9 a.m., German Master Sergeant Rauca appeared and ordered the Jews to file past him in family groups. Pointing a baton, he separated individuals into two groups.

About 10,000 Jews; children, women without men, old and sick people and cripples were assembled on one side. Apparently, there were not enough of them, so others were "selected" to fill the quota.

All of these were then herded to the 9<sup>th</sup> Fort of Kovno by Lithuanian police and so-called Lithuanian partisans under the supervision of German military. Some of the Jews were murdered on Demokratu Square, others on the march, but most of them were kicked, stabbed, beaten, clubbed and shot to death at the Fort. All had to undress. Many women were raped before being murdered. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, the killing was completed.

My mother, Fanny, aged 38 and my sister Dagmar, aged 16, were among the martyrs, as were my great aunt Ite and great uncle Samuel Silbermann, aged 52 and 56 years.

Some of the above was told me by Renee Gadiel, nee Silbermann, my mother's cousin and eyewitness of the selection; known among survivors as "Die groszse Aktion." This monstrosity is described in two books: Surviving the Holocaust, the Kovno Ghetto Diary, by Avraham Tory, published by Harvard University Press in 1990 and in A Kaddish for Kovno by William W. Mishell, published by Chicago Review Press in 1988. (Renee, her husband Peter and sister-in-law Rosel Richman are mentioned in the latter book).

Signed: Peter Hirschberg May 23, 1994

*Note: Photos and other documents of the "Great Action" are in the Washington Holocaust Museum. At least one photo shows naked women at the 9<sup>th</sup> Fort.*

*This decent, kind, wonderful, civilized man lived with infinitely deep sorrow. His anger, crystallized in poetry, was reserved for those who harmed his loved ones and his people.*



Chern

Serfs you were under your Tsars;  
Slaves under your commissars.  
Slaves under your old religion.  
And under your new as well.  
Petrified: Your thoughts of freedom.  
Free or slave – you cannot tell.

Caged you are and caged you'll be.  
You may think that you are free;  
But you can't leave home and wander;  
See the world; make up your mind.  
Bound you are; body and spirit;  
Mother Russia's dark mankind.

*Note: Chern: “Dark people”; i.e. serfs, peasants under the Romanov regime.*

*This untitled poem is Daddy's masterpiece.*

Untitled



Winter's snow has soaked the earth  
    Readyng for spring's rebirth.  
Bushes, shrubs, grasses and trees.  
Roots and seeds store food for these.  
    And all nature comes alive.  
Plants turn green. Animals thrive  
    In the northern forest land.  
Unchanged only is the sand  
    Of the beaches backed by pines  
Which have lost their white outlines.

All the white now at wave's crest,  
Amber coast's pale sand is dressed  
    In a girdle of soft dunes  
Where wind, gulls provide the tunes  
    To the drumbeat of the sea –  
Spring or winter, wild and free.  
    Inland's only white in spring  
    Graceful birches in a ring.  
Like lithe maidens of the woods,  
Dressed in light green veils and hoods.

Nature now with warmer mien  
    Weaves a carpet all in green;  
    While the ice of river, pond  
Has escaped from winter's bond.  
Thinned and cracked and melted down  
    Crystal water for a crown.

Formed along with sunshine, air;  
Bound with soil – cornet most fair.  
    On the river, ducks afloat  
Down below, tadpoles; a boat  
    Still upturned at river's side  
Soon to serve as angler's ride.  
    Horses outdoors now; unpent  
Romp and gambol – Mirthful lent.  
    Deer and elk look forward to  
Fresh, soft green shoots then to chew.

While up high, fly slowly flailing,  
Huge majestic storks come sailing;  
Always pairs: red, white and black  
North from Nile stream soaring back.  
    Voiceless, friendly, but aloof



Nest on the same village roof  
Where the owner in the past,  
Wagon wheel to ridgepole lashed.  
In the hope that one tall pair  
Would accept his offer fair.  
They add twigs now, leaves and reed,  
Then to mate and hatch and feed  
‘til it’s time for young and old  
to head south and spurn the cold.

This was spring ere human beasts  
From the West came to the East  
To commit vast, savage crimes  
Drowning those of other times.  
Turning spring to hell and gall.  
Now these beasts after their fall;  
In lands ring’d around the Nile  
Spawned their spawn, all full of bile.  
There to fester and to spread  
Poison vile, abuse and dread.

Storks of God – mark them – Swoop now –  
Slash and pierce the spawn below.  
‘Tis a modern plague long due.  
And let all of Zion shine anew.

*Fourteen years before Daddy died, he wrote this poem to my son Jacob and Paul's daughter Sunny.*

To you, unknown descendant yet to be  
I leave these thoughts from veiled eternity.  
The life you lead; American and Jew –  
May it be filled with love and justice true.



Hold high your head! Be free and strong and glad  
That you are what you are, and that you had  
A lineage going back to time of yore.  
True Giants whom the world owes: Mankind's core.  
And that your other lineage; the greatest land,  
Your land of birth, a beacon that does stand  
For all mankind to emulate and dream  
That one day maybe all this globe will gleam  
With justice, peace, health, happiness so pure –

But no, this never was; nor will be, I'm sure.  
Mankind's imperfect, is to say the least  
We thus must guard against the human beast  
That rises here and there, hungry for blood,  
To pounce on man and keep him in the mud.

Now you, little descendant, keep in mind  
Take care of yours first; family, country, kind.  
Accomplish work to show you were around  
Head in the clouds, maybe; but feet on ground.

But also know that life should be enjoyed;  
Thoughts, food, drink, music, art, books are employed  
To gladden our stay on Planet Earth  
In company with those whom we feel worth  
To share life's pleasures with us. Let us toast.  
And scatter flowers. I shall be the host  
Through done, dead, gone; nor yet the faintest breeze

You I salute. Be merry as you please!

